

63-year-old 1st lieutenant? It's not a joke!

Burnell loving role with Ohio Military Reserve

By 1st Lt. Shannon Scherer
179th Public Affairs Office

The 179th Airlift Wing has a 63 year-old first lieutenant running around.

This lieutenant retired from the 179th AW in 1998 as a master sergeant, but was just commissioned in June 2001.

Don't worry if you are confused, you should be.

1Lt. Elvin Burnell, a company commander in the Ohio Military Reserve, is a real-deal lieutenant. "Some people think I'm not a legitimate officer," said Burnell. "But the Ohio Military Reserve is subject to the same rules and regulations as the Guard in the state of Ohio."

The Ohio Military Reserve, formed in 1803, reports to the Adjutant General of the state of Ohio and is governed by the Ohio Uniformed Code of Military Justice. The militia assists in disasters, civil disturbances, convoys and physical security of state property. In times of state emergency the governor can call upon the state militia to backfill Guard members who may be federally activated.

The militia is authorized 2,400 personnel and trains in a non-pay status. Members are required to pull similar military training time as the National Guard. If activated by the governor, members of the militia receive pay equivalent to their militia military rank which is the same as the Guard.

Burnell, a state employee in the 179th Security Forces Squadron, said a lot of people here at the base are confused by the uniform he wears and capacity in which he serves. Burnell retired from



1Lt. Elvin Burnell

security forces in 1998, but in order to maintain his state position, which requires him to carry a weapon, he still must be in military uniform.

"I couldn't be in the Guard because I reached mandatory retirement age," he said. "But being in the state militia fills that requirement."

Burnell joined the Ohio Naval Militia in 1998, but soon discovered the Ohio Army Militia was more suited for his background in security forces.

With specialized training in anti-terrorism, interrogation, investigations and security systems, coupled with a background in industrial engineering and leadership, Burnell made quite a name for himself at the 179th and throughout the nation. His talents

did not go unnoticed by his commanders in the militia.

In July 2001, Burnell found out he was going to get a direct commission and in early October he would become the company commander for the 422nd Military Police Support Company in Mansfield. But he was quick to note that his direct commission did not excuse him from attending Officer Candidate School, something on his calendar for this summer, nor did it excuse him from a course load of work similar to the Air Force's CDCs.

Burnell said there are a lot of misconceptions about the Ohio Military Reserve when in actuality there are many similarities to the Guard. He said he was surprised at how many professionals join the militia and at the dedication of everyone involved to adhere to military standards, customs and courtesies.

"Many people in the militia have prior service," said Burnell. "Maybe they retired from active duty and want to continue to serve their state and country. Some may have medical problems that prevent them from being in the Guard, but not in the militia. I really couldn't believe their dedication, these people really do a good job."

Burnell commands a company of 23 people ranging in age from 18-55. "Most of the people are older, but there is a very diverse mix of individuals."

Getting use to being a commissioned officer after 33 years as an enlisted airman has had its challenges for Burnell, but he eagerly accepts the challenge. In fact, by the time he reaches age 67, mandatory retirement age for the militia, he hopes to be a major and battalion commander.

"I'm very impressed with the people of the Ohio Military Reserve," said Burnell. "They want to help their state and country and without pay. They really are the 'true patriots'."